



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Peterson, Head of the OSCE Office in Minsk

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 14, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Peterson to the Permanent Council. We hold the highest regard for Ambassador Peterson and his staff and appreciate deeply their outstanding service in the OSCE Minsk Office.

We commend Ambassador Peterson for his reliable monitoring of protests, political trials and the status of political prisoners. Despite often-difficult circumstances, Ambassador Peterson and his staff have continued to reach out to Belarusian civil society, to promote projects that improve the lives of Belarusian citizens and to raise awareness of the OSCE and its principles. We also note in a positive sense that the government of Belarus has allowed the OSCE's Office access to prisoners and to their trials and would urge that this openness be continued in the future.

We welcome the fact that, after considerable negotiation, the Belarusian government and the Office in Minsk were able to agree to a project on improvement of legislation on local self-governance, as well as projects on energy and the environment. We would further encourage Belarus to reach agreement with the OSCE on projects in the important area of rule of law. However, as Ambassador Peterson notes, none of the nine projects that have been agreed to have yet to be registered by the Belarusian government. Such a drawn-out bureaucratic process only serves to diminish the Office's effectiveness.

On another matter: Belarus will hold municipal elections in January 2007. In light of the OSCE Election Monitoring Mission's report on the March elections, we urge the government of Belarus to use next January's elections as an opportunity to demonstrate that it can indeed meet its OSCE commitments to democratic pluralism and civil society.

Ambassador Peterson, thank you for your report. We wish you success in carrying out your very difficult responsibilities in Minsk.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.